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ABSTRACT

In language arts classes a "composition" generally refers to a written text. Semiotic theory based on C. S. Peirce's work suggests that writing is only one of many forms of composition available for mediating thought and activity. According to J. V. Wertsch (1991), writing should be one tool in a tool kit of mediational means available to students. Stimulated recall was used to elicit retrospective accounts from alternative school students after their production of artistic texts as a response to a short story. Focus is on one student who drew a picture representing his view of the relationship between two central characters in a story. The study was done in a residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility that provided therapy for recovery and public school education classes. The student's account indicates that in composing his text he: (1) initiated his interpretation by empathizing with one of the characters; (2) represented action symbolically; (3) created an intertextual link; and (4) produced a text that both shaped and was shaped by his thinking. His account of non-linguistic composing processes suggests that non-linguistic texts have great potential for enabling students to construct meaning in their responses to literature. The study, while exploratory, suggests several hypotheses about the potential of composing non-verbal texts in helping students construct meaning and express understanding. (Contains 44 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Broadening the Notion of Text:
An Exploration of an Artistic Composing Process

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Abstract

In Language Arts classes a "composition" generally refers to a written text. Semiotic theory based on Peirce suggests that writing is only one of many forms of composition available for mediating thought and activity. Writing, according to Wertsch (1991), should be one tool in a "tool kit" of mediational means available to students. The present study used stimulated recall to elicit retrospective accounts from alternative school students following their production of artistic texts as a response to a short story. This report focuses on one student who drew a picture representing his view of the relationship between the two central characters in the story. The student's account indicates that in composing his text he (1) initiated his interpretation by empathizing with one of the characters, (2) represented action symbolically, (3) created an intertextual link, and (4) produced a text that both shaped and was shaped by his thinking. His account of non-linguistic composing processes suggests that non-linguistic texts have great potential for enabling students to construct meaning in their responses to literature. The study, while exploratory in nature, suggests several hypotheses about the potential of composing nonverbal texts in helping students construct meaning and express understanding.

Broadening the Notion of Text:
An Exploration of an Artistic Composing Process

As part of what he calls "a constructivist semiotic of writing," Witte (1992) argues that composition researchers need to develop "a broader, more culturally accurate notion of writing and text" (p.238). Writing research, he asserts, is limited by prespectives that "presuppose verbal language as the only sign system relevant to the study of writing" (p.249). Drawing on the semiotic theories of Peirce (1931-1958), Witte sees linguistic signs (including writing) as one of many types of signs through which people make meaning. He maintains that "regardless of the symbols out of which they are made, [texts] are no more than Peircean signs [that] suggest only a 'meaning potential'" (p.287) taking on meaning through constructive acts on the part of the reader.

Referring to the research of Graves (1983), Witte (1992) notes that "young children often do not think of texts or writing strictly in print-linguistic terms" (p.238), an attitude that they apparently abandon by the time they reach high school (Applebee, 1981, 1984). Many teachers and theorists regard writing as having almost mystical powers of expression and self-realization, being "revered -- and feared -- as a kind of magic, as a process of invoking the muse, of hearing voices, of inherited talent (Murray, 1980, p.3). If Language Arts teachers value writing because of its potential for enabling meaningful

expression and learning, then the identification of similar potential in other forms of texts could help teachers rethink the range of compositions they make available for students in their classes.

In order to consider nonlinguistic texts to have validity in Language Arts classes, teachers would need to accept Peirce's (1931-1935) notion that no single sign system has status over another. Orr's (1986) has proposed the idea of cultural semiotics, which "has broadened the meanings of the terms 'text, 'language' and 'reading' to include almost everything perceived as partaking in a sign relationship" (p.812). Lemke (1988) argues that

> Language, of course, is not the only resource for making social meaning. All modes of socially meaningful human action are semiotic: drawing pictures, gesturing, pitching a baseball, washing dishes. In each case there is a general repertory of actions, made meaningful by being deployed in the context of an activity which is socially recognized and socially learned .... Anything that makes meaning is semiotic (p.82).

Key to such a semiotic perspective is the importance of constructing meaning through the production and interpretation of signs. The sign itself is inherently meaningless; it only takes on meaning through constructive acts on the part of the creator

or beholder. A modern Southern Baptist and Twelfth Century Arab, for instance, would surely impute quite different meanings to the stable sign of the cross.

Specific sign systems tend to become established as the privileged mediums of communication in particular settings. Schools tend to favor linguistic and logical/mathematical forms of expression (Gardner, 1983). Wertsch (1991), drawing on the work of Bakhtin and Vygotsky, has argued that educators should broaden their acceptance of the means through which students mediate thought and activity. In discussing mediation, Vygotsky focused on speech as the primary psychological tool people use to negotiate, make sense of, and affect the world around them. Semiotic mediation is a dialectic process. A psychological tool such as language or music, therefore, can simultaneously both shape and be shaped by a person's thinking as it mediates between thought and activity. The dialectic process is illustrated in the "writing to learn" movement, which views "writing as a tool for exploring a subject" (Applebee, 1981, p.100). When a writer uses the composing process as a vehicle for learning, the written text serves as a means of semiotic mediation with (1) the writer's thoughts shaping the language of the text and (2) the act of writing serving to help articulate the writer's thoughts.

Wertsch (1991) feels that when educators emphasize language as the primary means of semiotic mediation, they do not consider "the diversity of mediational means available to human beings"

(p.93). He argues that educators should consider allowing students to have access to a tool kit of mediational means that "allows group and contextual differences in mediated action to be understood in terms of the array of mediational means to which people have access and the patterns of choice they manifest in selecting a particular means for a particular occasion" (p.94).

Wertsch (1991) does not view different mediational means as involving different mental processes, or as having different inherent value, but rather maintains that "Some tools are more powerful and efficacious for certain activities or spheres of life, and others are more powerful and efficacious for others" (p.102). The extent to which a particular mediational means is privileged in a given setting depends on the communication needs of the situation, including the dispositions of the people involved and the conventions agreed to by the participants. Wertsch (1991) maintains that "If one asks why the teachers [under study] produced the kinds of questions, directives, and other utterances that provided the socializing context for their students, it is clear that these teachers were also ventriloquating through speech genres characteristic of the sociocultural context" (p.144).

Ventriloquation is Bakhtin's term for describing "the process whereby one voice speaks through another voice type in a social language" (Wertsch, 1991, p.59), thus perpetuating patterns of thought and speech. Many educators have argued that

ingrained patterns of classroom discourse make academic success more attainable for some students than for others (Cazden, John and Hymes, 1972; Heath, 1983; Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, in press). An academic focus that "convey[s] certain conventional reading and writing strategies to students who are on the margins of the academic community," argue Hull and Rose (1990) "can lead to conversational patterns that socialize students into a mode of interaction that will limit rather than enhance their participation in intellectual work" (p.296; cf. Heath, 1983; Moll and Diaz, 1987).

Hull and Rose (1990) are primarily concerned with the patterns of <u>discourse</u> that prevail in classrooms. Moving beyond the issue of language, Peirce's semiotic theory suggests that <u>a variety of text types</u> are legitimate mediums for constructing meaning in classrooms. The present study investigated the potential of non-linguistic texts for enabling students to make meaning, using a videotape to stimulate interviews with students about their composing processes following their production of artistic texts in response to a short story. "Text" in this context means any product or medium that participates in a sign relationship or is capable of making meaning (Lemke, 1988; Orr, 1986; Witte, 1992). For the present study students were given free range to produce any text of their choice. Through stimulated recall interviews, students reflected on the processes engaged in as they read the story, chose their textual medium,

ascribed meaning to the story, and produced their texts.

Method

Setting

The research took place in a residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility that provided both therapy for recovery and public school educational classes. The students had committed themselves (sometimes reluctantly) to long-term therapeutic, community-based treatment for six to eighteen months. Because of federal and state laws related to confidentiality, no information that links data, location, and specific identities of individuals may be described or suggested; the name of the student focused on in this report is a pseudonym. To protect the anonymity of the student and his family, this report includes no information on his background or his experiences within the facility. The study is thus limited in the extent to which it can reveal the specific context in which the episode was investigated.

A general description of the facility is possible, however. The setting for the research was an important factor in the students' recognition of artistic texts as legitimate social and intellectual expressions. The students (seventy percent of whom were behind grade level) lived at the facility, which was located in an isolated, rural community. The students could not leave the facility without supervision. They had no locks on their doors and were in continual therapy together, which contributed

to a climate of trust and dialogue. Students were responsible for all aspects of daily maintenance, and therefore cooked for each other and cleaned up after one another. To aid recovery, students needed to have a great deal of trust in one another and to support each other emotionally. Hugging, walking arm-in-arm, and otherwise displaying physical concern and support were common, regardless of gender; sexual contact, however, called for expulsion. Students could only be admitted to full-time status by a vote of the other residents.

The educational program was also quite unconventional. The facility employed only two teachers, each of whom taught a variety of subjects, enabling their instruction to cross disciplines easily. By the end of the second month of the year the students were familiar with an environment that validated a variety of ways of knowing and interacting. With subject-area boundaries softened and with a variety of means of expression appreciated, the teachers could employ unconventional communication genres, a broadened version of what Bakhtin (1986; cf. Wertsch, 1991) called "speech genres."

Speech genres describe an appropriate grammar and terminology, and also "specify regular sequencing of types of action, of the functional constituents of an overall activity [such as] the question-answer-evaluation dialogue of classrooms" (Lemke, 1988, p.82). Bakhtin (1986) says that "Certain features of language take on the specific flavor of a given genre: they

knit together with specific points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents characteristic of the given genre" (p.289). Wertsch (1991) maintains that "socialization involves mastering the rules for using particular speech genres in particular sociocultural settings" (p.130). Although Bakhtin characterized speech genres as linguistic phenomena, Holquist (1981) argues that "Bakhtin seems to endorse that broad definition of language offered by Jurij Lotman in The Structure of the Artistic Text, 'any communication system employing signs that are ordered in a particular manner' (p.8)" (p.430). In the context of the present discussion the concept applies to the distinctive characteristics of communication in particular environments, regardless of the medium. Thus the term communication genre would more appropriately describe the conventions governing appropriate expression when students use a "tool kit" of mediational means (Wertsch, 1991). In the alternative school, students had access to a variety of communication genres as they constructed meaning in and across the various disciplines.

Procedures

The data were collected on two consecutive days at the end of the second month of a typical school year. On the first day the classroom was set up in its normal arrangement, which seated students at a loose collection of small tables each accommodating 4-5 chairs, plus additional chairs and a couch. In two adjacent

corners of the room, video cameras were angled at forty-five degrees so that every point in the room was filmed by either or both cameras.

Students were given individual photocopies of a short story, William Carlos Williams' "The Use of Force." The story concerns a doctor who narrates an account of a house call he makes during a diphtheria epidemic. The doctor must extract a throat culture from a young girl who has displayed symptoms of the illness. The girl battles him savagely and hysterically to prevent him from examining her throat, and her parents try to help the doctor by holding her down and shaming her into complying. During the course of the struggle the doctor develops contempt for the parents and passion towards the girl. Against his rational judgment, the doctor becomes lost in "a blind fury" to attack and subdue the girl. In "a final unreasoning assault" he overpowers her and discovers her "secret" of "tonsils covered with membrane." The story ends with a final act of fury in which the girl attacks the doctor "while tears of defeat blinded her eyes."

The teacher wrote instructions on the chalk board for the students to read the story and then, either alone or in a group of their choice of any size up to five, fashion some product or text in response to the story. The room had been stocked with a variety of mediums through which the students could express themselves: conventional paper and pens for writing, tinker toys, paints and other art supplies, a versatile keyboard synthesizer,

a simpler keyboard instrument, and a computer with graphics program. In addition, some students went to their rooms and got guitars, cassette music tapes, masks, and other resources to supplement what had been provided for them.

The students had a total of one hour in which to read the story, decide how and with whom they would respond to the story, and produce their texts. The video cameras filmed the entire hour, including the reading of the story.

Data Collection

The research employed "stimulated recall," a method originally developed by Bloom (1954) to study students' thought processes during classroom discussions and lectures. Bloom filmed students during discussions and lectures and immediately used the film as a stimulus for a retrospective account describing thought processes during the class period. He developed the method to identify thought process and levels of attention without interrupting the classes or processes themselves.

Most stimulated recall studies have attempted to identify a precise running record of "mental processes occurring during the event" (Rose, 1984, p.23). The research reported here did not intend to track the linear unfolding of cognitive processes, but rather aimed to explore the range and depth of cognition. If these processes are assumed to be recursive, then identifying their sequence is less important than exploring their depth. The

research used the stimulus of the videotape to elicit an open-ended interview from the students, instead of employing verification measures to identify a sequence of processes as used by Bloom (1954) and Rose (1984). (See DiPardo, in press, for a discussion of stimulated recall interviews that do not aim for precise process tracking.)

The researcher should be considered as part of the data, rather than as a neutral participant in the conduct of the interviews. "Neutral" behavior in interviews is at best an illusion (Rosenthal, 1966; cf. Smagorinsky, in press). The interviewer helped to scaffold the subjects' recollection of process, and thus was a participant in the account. Instead of viewing this participation as a contaminant of the data, many view the researcher's role in such interviews as instructive and as a contribution to the subject's learning during the course of the investigation (Swanson-Owens and Newell, in press).

The interviewing methodology takes into account the dialogic nature of meaning. Dialogism is Bakhtin's term describing the way in which thought is inherently social: "Everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole -- there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (Holquist, 1981, p.428). To Bakthin (1981), all thought is rooted in prior thought; monologic thought is impossible. He maintains that

> In any actual dialogue the rejoinder [leads] a

> double life: it is structured and conceptualized in the context of the dialogue as a whole, which consists of its own utterances ("own" from the point of view of the speaker) and of alien utterances (those of the partner). One cannot excise the rejoinder from this combined context made up of one's own words and the words of another without losing its sense and tone. It is an organic part of a hereroglot unity (p.284).

The interaction of the interview, therefore, makes the dialogic nature of the subject's reflection explicit.

The data collection in the present investigation proceeded as follows: The student sat with the researcher in front of a large television screen. In that the video camera had captured students other than the one being interviewed, the student under study was "framed" on the television screen by taping paper around the border of their images to help focus on his activities. As the videotape played, a portable audiocassette tape recorder recorded the interview between researcher and subject. The researcher's questions were not preplanned, but were stimulated by the activity on the videotape. The researcher's role, therefore, was to use the videotape to pose open-ended questions requesting retrospection about the thought processes behind particular behaviors.

Selection of Subjects

Due to a number of limitations, the researchers selected a

sample of students to study, rather than all the students in the class. The limitations were imposed by both time and resources. As part of their rehabilitation, the students' lives were heavily scheduled at the facility. They had to attend therapy sessions, prepare and fix meals, and participate in work duty to maintain the facility. The research was designed to be as unobtrusive and respectful of the students and their rehabilitation as possible, and the research was conducted so as not to upset the priorities of the program. Therefore, at certain times of day interviews could not be scheduled. The facility's schedule also accounted for the limit of one hour in which to film the students' text productions.

The interviews took roughly one hour, and resources were limited to one VCR on which to play the tapes and one researcher to conduct the interviews. Therefore, only one interview could be conducted at a time, and these could be conducted only at certain times. The limitations of time and resources enabled the collection of a total of four interviews. Coming back on a third day (which would have been a Monday) would have allowed too much lapsed time for recall, even with the stimulus of the videotape (Bloom, 1954; Greene and Higgins, in press).

The students were selected according to their availability, the type of text they composed, the size of group they participated in, and how they represented the racial and sexual makeup of the student body. This report focuses on one student

who drew a picture in response to the short story.

Results

This report features the stimulated recall interview with one student in the class, Dexter, who drew a picture (see Fig. 1) to depict the relationship between the doctor and the girl in "The Use of Force." In his account Dexter revealed a number of processes that helped shape his composition of an artistic text: (1) he drew on personal experiences to empathize with one of the characters, (2) he represented action symbolically, and (3) he drew on an intertextual link to create the picture's perspective. All of these processes revealed (4) the dialectic function his text served in helping mediate thought and activity: his thinking both shaped and was shaped by the text he created. The following sections reveal how Dexter's composition of an artistic text illustrated and influenced his understanding of the story.

Empathizing with Characters

Dexter's empathy with the girl in the story appears to have been a starting point for his interpretation. His original reading of the story was at the literal level. He said that he had

> read it one time just to find the purpose ... At the beginning I was trying to figure out what was, what happened in the story -- I do remember, uh, looking, like, being able to tell that people were reading faster than me because I guess I was, I was, I was

> thinking about something during the story. I don't remember what it was. Something else, I was thinking about something difficult. That's how I got involved in the story.

Later, in discussing which aspects of the story had provided the focus for his drawing, he said, "When the mother was shaming the daughter, that part. I gave a lot of attention to it .... it's wrong, and, but I can relate something in my life to the story and [inaudible] draw." Dexter related a childhood experience that had influenced his depiction of the relationship between the girl and the doctor:

> Well, when I'm sad, I always - when, when I'm a kid and I'm laying down, and, I was like seven or eight, six or seven, I was laying in my bed and I was afraid of the dark, and I was afraid of snakes, and so I brought in my cover-up and I'd be afraid something would come under. It was going to [inaudible], bad was going to harm, and when I put that blanket over me, I felt secure. And so when [the girl in the story] got up against the wall, it would be protective from what is behind her, but, um, but, but she still felt insecure, and so that is why that shadow is like, you know, that shadow, I claim, is being her shame.

Dexter's remarks suggest that his empathy for the girl initiated his interpretation of the story. Theorists in the

tradition of Rosenblatt (1978, 1984) have argued that a reader's personal response to a text can be an important starting point for an interpretation. Probst (1987) maintains that

> If any task or question governs this first encounter with the text, it is, "What does this poem do to me -- what does it make me feel or think?" Identifying the effect of the work leads naturally to the question, "What is the source of that effect?" As we have seen, the source lies partially in the text and partially in the reader's experience. Distinguishing between the two demands both introspection and analysis, resulting in the act of interpretation .... (pp.19-20).

In moving from response to interpretation, Dexter switched the perspective in his text so that it represented the relationship from the girl's point of view. He created an image of a "hysterical" doctor, yet he said, "I read the doctor as being kind but, um, but I did see that the girl had her way she's, um, receiving him and thinks he might be, and that's the way she's receiving him." The reason Dexter switched perspectives for his text is "Because she was the one with the disease, the diphtheria, and, uh, also because, uh, because I can relate to her attitude when I was that age too."

The process described by Dexter illustrates how his empathic connection to the girl helped him move from an initial personal response to the production of a text that represented both his

own and the girl's feelings of shame and fear. His text illustrates a shift in focus from Dexter's own feelings to the ways in which he sees those feelings played out through the girl. As Peirce's semiotic theory would predict, he is constructing meaning for the literary text by instantiating knowledge from his personal or cultural history. Dexter has thus infused the story with personal meaning so that he enriches his understanding of the character and depicts that understanding through his ability to convey emotion graphically.

Symbolic Representation

In order to convey his understanding of the relationship between the characters, Dexter depicted aspects of their personas symbolically. He first drew the doctor's hand,

> because it was showing that his, that [inaudible] would be pointing and everything is going to be all rotten .... It started with the hand and then moved on to -- I started with the person, and I knew he was -- I -- I knew I wanted a girl in the corner, and the person I just wanted to look like -- how she would see the person today to him and his -- how she sees his attitude -- I drew a fist.

Dexter's depiction of the doctor represented his understanding of the way the girl feels threatened throughout the diagnosis. He drew the doctor's hair to represent his "bizarreness." When asked why the doctor is shown stepping

towards the girl, Dexter replied,

Dexter: To show control.

Q: How is he doing that?

Dexter: Well, he is controlling her, because he is controlling her emotions like -- the way I think of it -- before I was thinking, well, this is all these people's attitudes, the parents and the doctors, the doctor, and uh, the reason I was thinking the parents were wrong was because that's from she was programmed to honor her program the way her life's been before she learned to be, uh, to run from shame or feel ashamed a lot, and that attitude was put into the doctor too, because of the way she sees the doctor, and power comes from him making her get pushed back into the corner. He is afraid too to open her mouth to see whether or not she has diphtheria.

Q: So he is walking toward her? Is that why that last leg is up like that?

Dexter: Yeah.

Q: And that's the power?

Dexter: Yeah. Well, it's the power scaring her. It's supposed to be scary.

Q: Uh-huh. Earlier you said you thought the doctor was a kind man. Is that what you said?

Dexter: Yeah. I said in the story he was considered

kind to my idea, but I went from the place of the girl and the way she was acting in the story to see how she, to see how the doctor was.

Dexter's interpretation of the story appears based on his empathy for the girl, even to the point of representing the doctor from the way she viewed him rather than the way Dexter himself viewed him as a reader. As he reports, the text he created was designed to convey a sense of power on the part of the doctor and a feeling of fear on the part of the girl.

In switching the perspective in his drawing from the doctor's narration to the viewpoint of the girl with whom he empathized, Dexter distorted the doctor's fist, hair, and walk to create a threatening effect. Dexter represented other aspects of the story symbolically as well. As noted earlier, Dexter created a shadow behind the girl to represent her shame. In contrast to the dark shadow, he drew a window to represent a sense of serenity:

Q: Now there's a -- is that thing, is that a painting on the wall, or is that a window?

Dexter: That is a window.

Q: Why did you do that?

Dexter: I wasn't sure, but I think that, it's like, it has a bird in a tree which I always [inaudible] thing, a little picture in color, I guess, but I was thinking I could show contentment being behind everything

because, um, she did have it when the doctor refuses [inaudible] something good would resolve out of it or nothing would focus on that.

Q: Yeah, is that -- why did you make it that size?

Dexter: Because if it were any more attention to it, then you could -- it would be noticeable and the picture would be drawn wrong. It would be noticing the cheer.

Dexter's ability to establish spatial relations to depict the focus of attention and the relative importance of other symbols reveals a highly complex understanding of the story, his own experiences that inform his reading, and his own ability to represent his understanding of himself and the story graphically.

Creating an Intertextual Link

In formulating his picture, Dexter created an intertextual link between his own drawing and a film he had seen:

Dexter: I got an idea of the way, the way this set-up is, how the drawing is, from an old Pink Floyd movie, Breaking the Wall .... It is like an old memory from when I was a kid, that, um, [inaudible] is getting out or whatever, this guy was getting out, and he was, like, and everything was real long, and the world was so big and he was this little, small, small person.

Q: Oh, so this whole idea of the perspective was from that movie?

Dexter: No, it came through my mind. I did [inaudible] use it somehow.

Q: Did that, did that image from the movie influence the way you did this?

Dexter: Yeah.

Q: How so?

Dexter: From the way I reduced all of her. She's real small.

Dexter's comment that the perspective was not borrowed from the movie directly but rather that "it came through my mind" illustrates the phenomenon of ventriloquation. As Bakhtin (1981) notes, "Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral or impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's concrete contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from these that one must take the word, and make it one's own" (pp. 293-294; cf. Kristeva, 1980, 1986; Nystrand, 1986, 1989). Rather than simply copying the perspective from the Pink Floyd movie, Dexter incorporated the image of the film into his own representation of the relationship between the doctor and girl. In his graphic text, <u>image</u> acts in the same manner as <u>voice</u> does in verbal communication. He thus builds an intertextual link between his own personally meaningful text and a text produced through the social image of his teenage culture.

Dialectic Function of Text

Dexter's account reveals the manner in which his thinking both shaped and was shaped by the text he composed. Dexter knew when he began reading the story what medium he would employ to represent his understanding:

Dexter: I knew I was going to draw.

Q: How did you know that already?

Dexter: Because, uh, what I want to do is work on -- my artistic ability.

Q: Uh-huh. Is that something you work on a lot?

Dexter: I am just starting to because I lost my way around two years ago.

Q: How did you lose your way?

Dexter: I didn't use it.

Rather than having a fully-formed picture of the characters in his head prior to drawing, Dexter said that "at the end, I understood what I was doing more than I did when I began the drawing .... I got more involved in the picture as I did it." Dexter started by drawing the hand. He continued:

Dexter: I wasn't thinking about the attitude of the girl or whatever .... I knew I wanted everything focused on the hand. I wasn't thinking about the background yet.

Q: You didn't know what the rest of the picture would look like?

Dexter: Yeah, and I had an idea the girl might be in the corner.

Q: Uh-huh, that's interesting. You didn't really know, you didn't know what the guy would look like or anything?

Dexter: No.

Q: Or what he'd be doing?

Dexter: I knew he'd have to have big, bigger footsteps when he walked. The way he is walking.

Dexter reveals through these statements that he had envisioned roughly what the picture would look like prior to drawing, but had not filled in the specifics. His thinking about the story, especially in light of his own personal feelings of shame, helped him shape his representation of the relationship between the characters as he depicted them in his drawing.

At the same time, the process he went through in composing his text helped shape his thinking about the story. In his initial reading, Dexter had simply tried to follow the action: "It was just I was really lost at first, because I don't really know how to get into the story from the start, and it takes me a page or two, you know, to understand it, so I had to go back to get it." Eventually he began "thinking about something during the story .... something difficult" that helped get him involved in his reading. When he began drawing, he was uncertain about how he would depict the characters, knowing only that the

relationship would involve shame and control. As he drew, his understanding of the characters intensified as he added details and gained new insights.

Another portion of the interview reveals this dialectic process. As he was drawing, Dexter had not been certain that the threatening figure would represent the doctor:

> Dexter: I wasn't really sure if it was him going to be the doctor or not until the end of the story, I mean, until the end of the drawing, because I was thinking, well, it could be this person that she, that she has imaged in her mind and uh -- or this could be an analogy of diphtheria, but then I said it doesn't matter. It's just a doctor. It was going through her mind, [inaudible] but I liked to read. The first time I'd read the doctor; the second, the analogy. It's just through that one story.
>
> Q: So you mean, even after you drew the face and everything, it wasn't the doctor yet?
>
> Dexter: Uh-huh. I mean it could have been a lot of things. It depends on your view point of the picture, but what I was thinking is -- it was the doctor and then it was an analogy of the whole attitude of the story, and then it was the, her parents' attitude, or the parents, especially her parents.

The process by which the text both <u>shapes and is shaped by</u>

Dexter's thinking illustrates the idea of mediation so important to Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) discussions of the role of language in cognitive growth. Vygotsky's research centered on language as the primary psychological tool for mediating thought and activity. The experience of Dexter suggests that other forms of expression also have potential for enabling students to articulate their understanding of literature.

Discussion

Any discussion of Dexter's artistic composing process must take into account the exploratory nature of the research. Dexter's experience represents a single case in a unique situation and therefore is difficult to generalize from. We will therefore seek to develop hypotheses from our analysis rather than reach conclusions.

As argued by Wertsch (1991; cf. Hanna, 1987), Dexter's interview suggests that an artistic composing process includes many processes that parallel those found in a writing process. The processes are not identical, as exhibited by Dexter's reliance on nonverbal symbols in his drawing. Yet as the analysis shows, Dexter drew on prior knowledge of his personal experiences and of previously encountered texts, and used his text as a vehicle for exploring his subject; and he planned, set goals, and revised his text in the manner of the writers studied by Flower and Hayes (1984). The research therefore supports the notion that artistic texts have no less inherent value for

thinking and communicating than do written texts.

The first hypothesis suggests a second: that artistic texts are potentially potent sources of mediation in Language Arts classes, serving similar semiotic functions to those of written texts. Relatively few publications (i.e., Clagget and Brown, 1992; Smagorinsky, 1991, 1992; Walker, 1992) relate Language Arts to other forms of artistic expression. Yet if Dexter's composing process is at all representative of the potential for nonverbal composing in other students, then teachers might consider providing opportunities for the production of a broader range of texts in the classroom. Some might believe that opening up the range of texts acceptable in Language Arts will represent an attempt to lower academic standards and implies that we need not teach students -- particularly students with records of failure -- how to write. Such an interpretation would be a distortion of this suggestion. Dexter's experience illustrates the potential for meaning construction available through the production of unconventional texts. The demonstration of this potential does not suggest that teachers should abandon convention altogether. As Heath (1991) has cautioned in addressing the problem of the influence of cultural differences on academic success, "The goal is not to use this knowledge about minorities' ways of using language and habits of learning to tailor classrooms to fit the daily habits of each minority group [but instead] to incorporate some of these additional ways in order to facilitate learning

about learning by all students" (p.21).

Heath's advice suggests a third hypothesis: that artistic texts can provide an important bridge between the literacies that students bring to school with them and the literacies necessary for success in academic work. Through the process of the interview, Dexter gave verbal articulation to the ways in which his drawing represented his understanding of the story. If students were to produce artistic texts and then explain them to another person, the process could lead to the sorts of written texts valued in classrooms. The interview structure described in this report would undoubtedly be cumbersome in a classroom, yet teachers could devise other formats such as having students talk with partners or members of a small group. Following the conversations, students could produce written texts accounting for their interpretations. The production of artistic texts could then stand on their own as legitimate forms of expression, or serve as starting points for moving students towards more conventional literacies.

A fourth hypothesis is that the situatedness of Dexter's composition in the unique environment of the alternative school suggests that the academic success of students depends in part on the communication genres established by teachers and institutions. Drawing a picture appears to have been a valuable means of understanding and representation for Dexter. Gardner (1983) has argued that schools need to consider the spectrum of

"intelligences" employed by people across cultures and assess students in classrooms through more varied means. Dexter's performance in the alternative school could have been facilitated by his teacher's encouragement of multiple modes of expression. Whether students could so fruitfully represent their understanding artistically in a different type of environment is a question worthy of investigation.

The research, then, provides support for the view that "composing" is not an exclusively verbal process. In attempting to synthesize the series of studies they conducted to analyze the writing process, Flower and Hayes (1984) proposed what they called the "Multiple Representation Thesis," which states that "As writers compose they create multiple internal and external representations of meaning. Some of these representations, such as an imagistic one, will be better at expressing certain kinds of meaning than prose would be, and some will be more difficult to translate into prose than others" (p.122). The experience of Dexter suggests that for some students in some situations, an imagistic composition may be an appropriate and powerful medium of expression, one that involves composing processes valued by educators and one that serves social purposes important to helping a student "find his way" and represent his thoughts meaningfully in a text.

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